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GOVPUBCASE STUDY ON THE CARMA CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE
IN HOME BUILDING AND LAND DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

This case study examines the development and outcomes of the Calgary-based Carma Centre for Excellence in Home Building and Land Development. As an industry-driven approach to addressing skill and labour shortages in the local residential construction industry, the Carma Centre is a particular applied strategy, which could be replicated in other locations across Canada to improve the industry's approach to trades training and professional development.

The industry's human resources issues include an aging workforce in the trades, fewer new entrants to the industry and a growing concern about a skills shortage among new workers. The Carma Centre evolved to address specifically these human resources issues: the industry's overall lack of investment in training and development; the lack of succession planning and a perceived lack of awareness and respect for a career in the trades, on the part of youth and their influencers. CMHC has been involved in supporting a broader initiative in conjunction with the Canadian Home Builders' Association and Social Development Canada (formerly, Human Resources Development Canada) to identify a strategy for addressing national shortages in the construction trades.

The Carma Centre, incorporated in April 2000, was funded by key industry members and it was named after the initial funders, Carma Developers, a Calgary-based company. The Carma Centre's partners include:

- The Calgary Region Home Builders Association (CRHBA)
- The Professional Home Builders Institute of Alberta (PHBIA)
- The Alberta New Home Warranty Program (ANHWP)

- The Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT)
- The Calgary Board of Education (CBE)

The Carma Centre's goals include developing and maintaining a skilled workforce for Calgary's professional homebuilding industry and promoting specialized training by defining the basic opportunities and occupations in the residential construction and land development industry. The Carma Centre pursues local partnership-based initiatives with industry, educational institutions, government and residential construction organizations.

METHODOLOGY

The study approach involved conducting in-depth interviews with:

- Carma Centre's board members, industry supporters and other representatives from the residential construction industry
- Alberta government representatives
- Calgary School Board administrators, principals, career practitioners and construction teachers
- Industry association directors
- Post-secondary institutions representatives
- Representatives from groups of special interest to CMHC as a potential labour force in Calgary's residential construction industry (for example, women and Aboriginals)

The methodology included on-site interviews with trade contractors and focus groups, with school and career counselors. The qualitative information was supplemented by a literature review. Information for the case study was gathered from November 2003 to February 2004. The study took into consideration that a number of the Carma Centre initiatives are still in development stages and will evolve over time. It reviews the milestones that were achieved at that time.

FINDINGS

Key business development activities completed in the Carma Centre's formative years include:

- Identifying existing training initiatives to avoid duplication.
- Conducting an industry needs assessment to identify critical labour shortage categories.
- Soliciting five-year funding pledges from industry.
- Recruiting supporters at different funding levels.

In addition to strong financial commitment from industry, the Carma Centre received grant funding from CMHC, and project-specific funding from Human Resources Development Canada, Alberta Human Resources and Employment, and the Alberta Real Estate Foundation.

The Carma Centre's strategic plan is to act as industry champions and organizers—not to educate or to develop curriculum. Its specific role is to act as a facilitator for organizing, coordinating and focusing the assets and resources related to skills development in residential construction.

The Carma Centre includes a volunteer board of 12 members made up of founding board members, builders, government representatives, trade contract suppliers and representatives from educational institutions. The Board holds annual planning sessions to set short- and long-term goals. The various committees are created on an "as-needed" basis and some are "held in advance." Directors-at-large provide special support and advice to the committee members. On a day-to-day basis, the Carma Centre operates with an Executive Director and two assistants.

Finance:	For fundraising
Government Relations:	To explore government funding opportunities and maintain a high profile with public officials
High School Relations:	To promote career awareness through home building projects, a summer mentorship program, career fairs, and to respond to individual requests for information or presentations.
Programs:	To work with the Professional Home Builders Institute of Alberta (PHBIA) and the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (SAIT) to produce industry-required courses
Publicity:	To create greater awareness within and without the industry for recruitment, continuing education, skills training and upgrading
Marketing:	To develop a strategic marketing campaign; to connect with the high schools and the high school sub-committees; and to focus on promoting the career pathways model.

Figure 1: The Carma Centre's Committees and their mandates

Initiatives

The Carma Centre's key objectives include raising awareness about career opportunities available within the residential construction industry and creating valued training systems for workers and industry. While the target market is primarily high school students, the Carma Centre's plans include the engagement of influencers such as teachers and parents.

The first objective was to get their name "in front of industry and the community." The Carma Centre has received strong publicity and media coverage, primarily because of its uniqueness. Some of the early stage initiatives included conducting research to investigate attitudes and awareness; developing a website to serve as a database of information and to be used as a point of access to create awareness; attending trade shows and producing brochures, posters and CDs for distribution. As a result, in 2000, the Carma Centre received an award under CMHC's Housing Awards Program (HAP).

The Carma Centre has evolved into a multi-faceted organization to respond to the growing needs of the residential construction industry and to address the key factors affecting its labour supply. Some of the key products and initiatives underway include:

- Certification of key trades
- Occupational Descriptions and Skills Profiling Project (Skills Passport and Career Ladders)
- Career Pathways in Professional Homebuilding Project
- Summer Mentorship program

Certification of key trades

The Carma Centre believes that certification will respond to industry's need for future training and will remedy some of the challenges for attracting young people to the trades. Its plan for addressing a less-than-favorable societal perception of the occupations in the industry includes a combination of raising awareness of the career laddering possibilities, and developing an accreditation process. The Carma Centre is currently negotiating with the Alberta Apprenticeship and Industry Training Board to implement the residential trades certification.

Some of the challenges to certification include the potential that a "made-in-Alberta" certification could limit work mobility between provinces; the difficulty of gaining full buy-in by industry to support hiring only certified workers; and the maintaining of residential construction wage at levels comparable to those in commercial and industrial construction.

Skills Passport and Career Ladders

With input from industry, the Carma Centre is validating occupational descriptions for 48 occupations in residential construction industry and developing Career Ladder profiles for each one. They are working with industry to define job functions and the skill development required to move from pre-employment to a skilled craftsman.

Another key initiative is to complete a Skills Passport¹ for each of the residential construction occupations. The Skills Passport is based on a model used by the manufacturing industry. This initiative will result in a career-planning tool that outlines all of the competencies and skill requirements for an occupation. The Passport will assist workers in evaluating their transferable skills and identifying the career directions they can pursue. A critical milestone for the Carma Centre will be the implementation of the Passport which, to be successful, will require support from industry and the school system. This product will be pilot tested in the spring of 2005.

Career Pathways in Professional Homebuilding Project

The Career Pathways program allows students with clear career goals to begin learning skills in the residential construction trades while attending high school. Students participating in the program will achieve advanced placement at a post-secondary institution. The program includes opportunities for work experience, mentorship, internship and working in a summer program.

Together, the Carma Centre, SAIT and the high schools are working on the initial development of the Career Pathways Program for residential construction. This involves the review and revision of both the high school curriculum and the SAIT curriculum to identify training and educational gaps. While this program will require gradual implementation, launching the joint program is the next critical milestone for the Carma Centre. While moving towards the Career Pathway model is a paradigm shift already occurring in high schools, it poses the greatest challenge for the Carma Centre as high schools adjust curriculum and finances to a new responsibility of preparing students for the workplace.

Summer Mentorship Program

A significant accomplishment for the Carma Centre has been their relationship with youth and the interest the students have expressed in participating in a mentorship program.

Using the Calgary Board of Education's internship model as an opportunity to introduce high school students to the residential construction industry, the Carma Centre

¹ A Skills Passport is a physical document that records an individual's mastery of skills and competencies required for a particular occupation.

formally implemented the Home Builders Summer Mentorship Program in 2000. The Summer Mentorship Program provides work experience opportunities for students interested in the industry, and an occasion to introduce them to the many options available in residential construction. In addition to promoting the trades as a career, the Carma Centre is also promoting entry into residential construction in occupations such as administration, sales and management.

While the mentorship project has been a positive accomplishment, unresolved issues remain. These include the challenge of matching the student with the right opportunity and convincing industry to dedicate more time and resources to the program.

Marketing

The Carma Centre's marketing strategies are being implemented in stages. In addition to the youth and public awareness initiatives that occurred during the early formative stage, the next large marketing program will occur in the spring of 2005 and includes:

- introducing the Skills Toolkit² into the high schools
- marketing the industry to the students' influencers including parents and teachers

Non-Traditional Worker Groups

The Carma Centre is in the early exploratory stages, studying ways to involve non-traditional workers as a potential source of labour supply. These include:

- Women
- Aborigines
- Out-of-school and Disadvantaged Youth

Currently, the Carma Centre is concentrating on successfully implementing their programs in high schools before turning their resources to non-traditional pools of workers.

Key Success Factors of the Carma Centre

- **Information and Research.** This has added value to the industry by providing insight on current and future labour issues and training requirements.
- **Being Proactive.** As an industry-led initiative, industry has been involved at the beginning of the planning stages, as well as the government in a supporting role.

- **Committed Supporters.** The Carma Centre is led by a board of visionary industry leaders committed to achieving their objectives.
- **A Focus on Partnerships.** Gaining recognition by the Calgary Board of Education of the value of working with industry has been a considerable accomplishment. This has significantly heightened the profile of residential construction as a career opportunity within the school system.
- **Funding Support.** The attention to cost effectiveness has been one of the strengths of the Carma Centre. Financial support from within the residential construction industry has allowed the Carma Centre to focus directly on the goals of working with youth, parents and teachers. Government funding has allowed the Carma Centre to implement special projects such as, exploring non-traditional workers as a potential source of labour supply.

Future Initiatives

Future Carma Centre work includes the finalization of:

- Development and launch of a marketing toolkit aimed at youth awareness
- Curriculum development
- Network development
- Additional liaison efforts with school boards and secondary schools, and post-secondary institutions.

CONCLUSIONS

The Carma Centre is a unique labour market initiative involving construction industry partnerships with educational organizations and government. The Calgary residential construction industry has shown leadership in recognizing, ahead of others, the employment and skills issues in the local residential construction industry. Day-to-day competitors have banded together to work at resolving the industry's short- and long-term human resources concerns in a practical and industry-relevant manner.

The Carma Centre's strategic alliances have focused on building partnerships with post-secondary and secondary institutions to deliver training, rather than becoming a competitor of these institutions. The case study notes that education, partnerships and networking are key components of the Carma Centre concept. It provides an in-depth

² The Skills Toolkit includes career information which is targeted towards high school students. The information comprises a complete suite of occupational descriptions of careers within the residential construction industry. This information which will be distributed in high schools is uniquely packaged in a box in the shape of a trade's toolbox.

review of the Carma Centre, the steps that led to training and awareness initiatives, and involvement in the Calgary Board of Education's Career Pathways program.

On a national level, the importance of looking at the Carma Centre as a model includes:

- *Housing Affordability*: The skilled worker shortage in the home building trades is resulting in building delays and is adding to the cost of new homes.
- *Housing Quality*: Quality standards are a key issue affecting the residential construction industry across Canada. The lack of industry accreditation will continue to decrease the quality of homebuilding.
- *National Labour Shortages*: Statistics Canada reports only 12 per cent of Canadians aged 25 or older (2.4 million) are qualified in a trade. A 2002 Conference Board of Canada report notes that by year 2020, Canada could be facing a shortfall of one million skilled workers. As well, 2001 Statistics Canada data reports that 250,000 Canadians had registered for the Apprenticeship program, but only 18,260 (less than 10 per cent) completed the program.

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